EPA: More pets injured by flea and tick products

By MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press Writer – Thu Mar 18, 1:07 am ET

WASHINGTON – Products intended to treat cats and dogs for fleas and ticks kill hundreds of pets each year and injure tens of thousands, the Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday as it outlined plans to make the products safer.

The EPA said it will develop stricter testing and evaluation requirements for flea and tick treatments that are applied to a pet's skin. The agency also will begin reviewing labels to determine which ones need to say more clearly how to use the products.

The EPA’s effort follows increasing complaints from pet owners that the “spot-on” products have triggered reactions in dogs and cats, ranging from skin irritation to neurological problems to deaths. Cats and small dogs appear particularly vulnerable, the EPA said, especially when given products intended for larger animals.

Steve Owens, assistant administrator of EPA's Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances, said new restrictions will be placed on flea and tick products, with additional changes for specific products likely — including possible changes in some product formulas.

"These are poisons," Owens said. "These are products designed to kill fleas and ticks — and they do their jobs."

The EPA is committed to better protecting the health and safety of pets and families, Owens said, but added that pet owners "need to carefully read and follow all labeling before exposing your pet to a pesticide."

The agency announced last April it was increasing scrutiny of topical flea and tick products because of the growing number of bad reactions reported.

The EPA said it received 44,263 reports of harmful reactions associated with topical flea and tick products in 2008, up from 28,895 in 2007. Reactions ranged from skin irritations to vomiting to seizures to, in about 600 cases, death of an animal.

An EPA spokesman said he did not have a breakdown of how many deaths were dogs and how many cats.

Dog and cat owners say their pets have suffered burns and welts on their skin; started to drool excessively; begun to shake uncontrollably; lost control of their legs or experienced other neurological problems after using the flea and tick treatments.

A 2009 study by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reported that the majority of illnesses linked to proper use of topical flea and tick products were mild. Cats were more susceptible than dogs to illnesses and deaths from misuse of the products, the report said.

"The important take-home message is that although adverse reactions can occur with all flea and tick products, most effects are relatively mild and include skin irritation and stomach upset," said Dr. Steven Hansen, ASPCA veterinary toxicologist and senior vice president for animal health services.

Pet owners should keep using the products as directed when faced with a flea infestation, Hansen said.

*Additional information*

- More photos and videos on the story at APImages.com
- For purchasing information or questions about the product, contact the manufacturer directly.
Georgia-based Merial Ltd., which makes the popular Frontline tick and flea treatment, defended its product and disputed the EPA data.

“The number of adverse events reported for Frontline has remained consistently low since the product’s introduction in 1996,” the company said in a statement e-mailed to reporters. The vast majority of reactions are minor, the statement said.

In a 29-page report, the EPA said the majority of problems for dogs occurred in smaller dogs, weighing 10 to 20 pounds. Some incidents occurred when products intended for larger dogs were given to smaller animals, the report said. Chihuahuas, Shih Tzus, miniature poodles, Pomeranians and dachshunds were among breeds where problems occurred the most, the EPA said.

Similarly, many problems for cats occurred when they were given treatments intended for dogs. The EPA is likely to require companies to revamp labels to clarify that products intended for dogs should never be used on cats, Owens said.

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On the Net:

EPA report on protecting pets: http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/health/pets.htm

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Jamie F. 20 hours ago | Report Abuse

About time. I have been reporting problems with Hartz flea and tick sold in grocery stores for YEARS. I wrote to the EPA and to Hartz a number of times. This problem has been going on for many many years...check out the web posts...Many times I see the store selling the product, I take it to the manager, explain what has been happening with the product, and tell them to check out on-line about it if they don’t believe me. But, guess what, EVERY STORE continues to sell the products. I had two cats HAVE SEVERE NEURO problems immediately after applying the Hartz product.

Reply

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DAMIANI! 20 hours ago | Report Abuse

Great I do love my cats and dogs and want them to be free of irritants but still with me.

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14

DONALD 20 hours ago | Report Abuse

Boy, the Tea Party won’t like this increase in “big” government’s “interference” in our lives. I mean, putting a government bureaucrat between me and my cats!

Reply

34

N K 20 hours ago | Report Abuse

Thats why I just use Horse fly spray products they repel fleas, ticks and all other pests with way less possible problems. And have multiple natural ones available too. Not including way more cost effective, a quart bottle may cost $15-20 but many have a 5-7 day spray. So a quart bottle lasts about 2 years where I live for 1 large dog. Obviously more dogs or outside dogs will go through more, but still way cheaper than this spot on stuff.

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I wonder if these treatments will work on humans... we've got a lot of fleas and ticks in Capitol Hill....

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<td>That's why you go to a reputable vet. Any good vet if they notice a problem with a product will stop selling it clients. Nobody want clients sick with a product you recommended. Twenty years ago I would tell friend &quot;get your product from your vet&quot; But I would get in return&quot; I can buy it at the pet store for a lot less&quot;.</td>
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<td>Our last dog had bad skin sores that were being treated by our vet. The &quot;problem&quot; never fully went away. I now have to wonder if it was Frontline that had &quot;caused&quot; some of these problems. Personally I'm glad this is being looked into! Our animals are important to us and the companies that make these products should be held accountable! We no longer use these products on the dog we currently have and he has been fine. No ticks or fleas and no skin irritations. How about class action law suits!</td>
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<td>I noticed a reaction after I put the drops on my dogs back. She started acting weird and kicking her legs in an odd way. I gave her a bath and have never used that stuff again. I did read on the packaging that some dogs may have a reaction to it. Now I get the pills from the vet and have not had any problems, they also treat for other parasites like heart worm.</td>
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